

Floor Statement of U.S. Sen. John Cornyn
The Naturalization and Family Protection for Military Members Act of 2003
Wednesday, June 04, 2003

Mr. President, I rise today to say a few words about this amendment, the Naturalization and Family Protection for Military Members Act of 2003.

In every war our nation has fought, from the Revolutionary War to Operation Iraqi Freedom, brave immigrants have fought alongside American-born citizens. They have fought with distinction and courage – twenty percent of the recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation's highest honor for war heroes, have been immigrants.

One in 10 active-duty military personnel call Texas their home, and as a member of the Armed Services Committee, I am dedicated to looking out for their interests and the interests of all military personnel... including immigrants. And that is why I introduced the Military Citizenship Act, a bill that will expedite the naturalization process for the nearly 37,000 men and women serving in our armed forces who are not U.S. citizens. I believe there is no better way to honor the heroism and sacrifice of those who serve than to offer them the American citizenship they deserve.

I am proud to support this amendment, because I believe it fulfills a critical responsibility to welcome those who fight for our nation, and help those immigrants become naturalized citizens, providing their families easy access to naturalization and family immigration protections.

Just take a look at this chart to see the kind of confused process that immigrant service members must endure in order to even be considered for citizenship. It's a sea of red tape spaghetti, needless bureaucracy, and ridiculous administrative requirements.

It's time to do away with this sort of thing once and for all. We must streamline this process, and make it one that welcomes immigrant service members for their bravery and sacrifice, not one that deters them from becoming citizens.

I thank my distinguished colleagues for supporting this bill, and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Warner for including language in the Defense Authorization Act which directs the Department of Defense to determine if any additional measures can be taken to assist the naturalization of qualified service members and their families.

And I strongly support the action of the President, retroactive to September 11, 2001, to exempt military members from the requirement to have served three years on active duty before applying for citizenship.

We must always remember that our own freedom was not won without cost, but bought and paid for with the sacrifices of generations. We must honor the heroic dead, for their courage and their tireless commitment to the dream that is freedom. And we must honor the worthy heroes who fight for us today, and embrace them as our fellow citizens.

In 1944, Winston Churchill spoke in Royal Albert Hall to the British and the American troops, and reminded them of the greater cause they served, regardless of the bounds of nations or cultures. "We are joined together in this union of action which has been forced upon us by our common hatred of tyranny," he said, "shedding our blood side by side, struggling for the same ideals, until the triumph of the great causes which we serve shall be made manifest... Then, indeed, there will be a day of thanksgiving, one in which all the world will share."

In Iraq, the brave men and women of our armed forces fought against those who hate our nation. They hate us because we believe "that all men are created equal" – regardless of their nation of birth. They hate us because we believe in the God-given rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" – rights that extend to all mankind. They hate us because we still say "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

These brave immigrant soldiers are taking on the uniform of our nation, serving under the flag of our nation, and fighting the enemies of our nation. It is only right that they should be welcomed as citizens of our nation.